

S The Historic San Diego County Administration Center

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San Diego County Administration Center

Just after the turn of the century, County and City leaders began proposing a centralized Civic Center to house government offices. But it wasn't until during the Great Depression that San Diego's "Jewel by the Bay" was born.

Construction began on the 10-story building known today as the County Administration Center in 1936 with a \$1 million allocation from the Works Progress Administration, a federal agency that funded government projects to relieve the mass unemployment throughout the nation. An additional \$750,000 in local funds was provided to complete the project. The 18-acre site, purchased from the state of California for \$1,000 in 1929, was bare land except for a few boat-houses.

The modified Spanish Revival style structure has 544 feet of frontage and is 244 feet deep, with more than 200,000 square feet. The original design included a tower soaring to 225 feet, but it had to be shortened by one-third because of its proximity to Lindberg Field. The building was on the forefront of engineering trends, one of the first projects to use steel pilings to bear lateral stresses, which meant a higher level of support in the event of an earthquake.

Design of the County Administration Center was entrusted to four San Diegans selected by a vote of local architects. The design committee was led by Samuel W. Hamill and included William Templeton Johnson, Richard S. Requa and Louis J. Gill. Chicago architect Jesse Stanton also contributed his talents to the design of the building.

Ceremonial groundbreaking activities for the building were held December 5, 1935; actual construction began January 4, 1936. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the man responsible for the WPA program that helped fund San Diego's "first skyscraper," presided over dedication ceremonies July 16, 1938

Originally known as the San Diego Civic Center, the building was owned jointly by the City and County of San Diego. Before the Civic Center was completed,



the two governments had offices scattered throughout downtown San Diego. Once it was finished, most of the key city and county services were brought together under one roof. Not only was this convenient for citizens of San Diego, but it saved taxpayer money by consolidating office locations.

But just 25 years after the San Diego Civic Center opened its doors, the two governments had outgrown the building. The City moved to a new downtown city hall in 1964 and the County purchased the City's interest for \$3.3 million.



The County Seal

In 1937, the Board of Supervisors adopted the County of San Diego seal, which had been designed by Samuel Hamill, one of the architects who designed the County Administration Center. The central element of the seal is a double-headed axe rising from a bundle of sticks, a symbol of authority in ancient Rome. Other elements include the stars and stripes of the United States, a stylized dolphin representing the fruits of the sea and a horn of plenty representing the fruits of the land. A clipper ship recalls San Diego's historic background of the sea, and the airplane looks into the future. Mount Palomar's Observatory represents a world-renowned achievement in science and San Diego's position on the threshold of scientific history. The observatory overlooks an orange grove, which reflects the agricultural riches of the County.



The County Flag

The Board of Supervisors officially adopted San Diego County's flag in 1957. The flag is comprised of three horizontal bands of red, white and green. The colors are a link to San Diego's past as a territory under the control of King Charles of Spain, Republic of Mexico and the Republic of California—as well as its present with the United States of America. The County seal appears in the center of the white stripe.

Mrs. Estelle Secor, a former drafter in the County Surveyor-Road department, designed the flag. Her original hand-sewn flag is on display at the rear of the Board chambers.

Guardian of Water

In 1939, prominent San Diego artist Donal Hord completed the 23-foot sculptured fountain "Guardian of Water" that graces the harbor side of the County Administration Center. A bequest to the San Diego Fine Arts Society and a grant from the Works Progress Administration funded this \$20,000 sculpture carved out of a 22-ton block of granite from Lakeside. It features the figure of a pioneer woman holding a water jug, which symbolizes the guardianship of water as one of San Diego's most important responsibilities.



Motto

The motto "The Noblest Motive is the Public Good" appears on the County seal and is inscribed over the west entrance to the County Administration Center. The words have been attributed to both British essayist Sir Richard Steele and ancient Roman poet Virgil.

The statement "Good Government Demands the Intelligent Interest of Every Citizen" appears in the mosaic in the floor of the foyer. It is also carved over the east entrance of the building. It was written by John Siebert who, as a San Diego City Councilman in 1936, served on the Building Committee.

Chamber Murals

Three murals grace the walls of the Board chambers. The works were commissioned by the WPA Federal Art Project and completed in 1939 by artists Jean Goodwin and Arthur Ames. The panels each depict a different aspect of life in San Diego County: recreation, agriculture and conservation.

Historical Background

The County of San Diego has the distinction of being the first of the original 27 counties of California. It was established by the California Legislature on February 18, 1850, shortly after California became the 31st state in the Union.

A Court of Sessions was created to handle the administrative affairs of the new County government. A five-member Board of Supervisors replaced the Court of Sessions in 1852 and held its first meeting January 3, 1853.

At the time of its creation, San Diego County comprised much of the southern section of California. The original County boundaries included San Diego, along with portions of what are now Imperial, Riverside, San Bernadino and Inyo counties.

The territory of nearly 40,000 square miles was reduced until 1907, when the present boundaries were established. Today, San Diego County covers approximately 4,255 square miles. It stretches 65 miles from north to south and 86 miles from east to west. San Diego County is the second largest county in the state, with a population of more than 2.7 million.

Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo discovered the region that eventually became San Diego on September 20, 1542. Although he named the area San Miguel, it was renamed 60 years later by Spaniard Don Sebastian Vizcaino. He chose the name San Diego in honor of his flagship and his favorite saint, San Diego de Alcala.